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Controversy at Cosmos

Oath Opposing Women Members Required

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The officers of Washington's posh Cosmos Club thought they had finally found a way to defuse the embarrassing controversy over admission policies that has simmered for more than a dozen years. Their solution: to require prospective members to sign an oath stating they will not seek to change the bylaws that exclude women.

Rather than squelching a debate its officers characterize as "unseemly," however, the policy seems likely to revive the furor over letting women join the elite social club that was founded 107 years ago for "men of accomplishment." Among its 3,100 members are Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun and William E. Colby, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The Cosmos Club is not tax exempt, and thus is under no legal obligation to admit women. Last year the club, located in an ornate Embassy Row mansion valued at \$5.1 million at 2121 Massachusetts Ave. NW, paid nearly \$104,000 in real estate taxes, city records show.

Within days after the policy was announced earlier this month by the club's board of management in its eagerness to "restore a tranquil and sociable atmosphere," the Committee of Concerned Members of the Cosmos Club, a group favoring the admission of women, hinted it might challenge the policy in court. A lawsuit, Samuel P. Hayes, leader of the Committee of Concerned Members, warned in a recent letter to the board, "could hardly take place without undesirable publicity."

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EXCERPTED